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AMERICA'S DEBT

TO

THOMAS PAINÉ,

BY

L. K. WASHBURN.

BOSTON:

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1878.

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America's Debt to Thomas Paine.

NO nation at the present time has a grander destiny folded within its powers and opportunities than the United States of America. Our very name stands for a freedom and fellowship, surpassing in possible achievement the brightest hopes of man. We are a free people. We love liberty. There is, in the breast of every American citizen, an instinct of freedom which resists any and all attempts to encroach upon human rights. The men who made freedom a fact in America, and united the States in one purpose, have been eulogized with every word of praise that gratitude could coin or affection employ. We have spoken the names of Washington, Jefferson, Franklin and Adams—our four great Americans—with all the fondness that the world has for countrymen, and all the love that mankind has for heroes. But there was no man who threw into the struggle for American Independence a clearer head, a braver heart, and a more tireless energy than the man who, though born in England, took the whole world for his country,—THOMAS PAINE.

This man, whom America to-day is ashamed to honor, did as much to put the crown of Liberty upon the forehead of our nation as any of those men whose names are enshrined in hallowed remembrance, from Maine to California. Would we realize the power that Paine possessed, we must turn back the pages of history and read over this man's life and the record of his services in the cause of liberty. Paine's name has been covered with obloquy by the Christian church, and the bold patriot, the brilliant writer, the fearless friend, the MAN, has been forgotten, while the creation

of a church's hate and a people's wrong has borne his name, and that name has been banned in all pious circles as the name of an infidel, an atheist, an inebriate, and a bad man. Paine's name; that was a terror to the royal powers of England; Paine's name; that was an inspiration to the American forces fighting for liberty and peace; Paine's name; that lighted up the councils of our nation in those dark hours when defeat seemed certain and the dream of freedom about to end in despair; Paine's name; that was applauded by the public voice and spoken with love and gratitude in private where his generosity and kindness had alleviated sorrow and want, has been hooted and scorned by a populace that should have been taught to speak it with pride, and honor it with reverence. It is little to give honor to such a man as Thomas Paine at this late hour, the man to whom Americans should erect a monument of praise. No voice so truly proclaimed our rights, no voice so nobly defended our cause. No man, at home or abroad, was more fearless for political and religious liberty, and it is due the memory of this great man, this true friend of human liberty, this brave champion of human rights, that Americans should bury in oblivion the foul stigmas that Christian ministers in their narrowness and bitterness have fastened to his name.

X Paine's pen did as much as Washington's sword to drive from our land the hired troops of British tyranny. The pamphlets of this man's brain were supplied to the patriot army as regularly as were powder and balls. Paine's soul too high for falsehood; his mind too bright for error; well might England with her royalty and ritualism denounce this revolutionist; but it is not the part of a free citizen of the United States of America, whose independence he labored to win, and whose liberty is surer for his existence—to join in the denunciation. "Well has Thomas Paine been called the 'man of three countries and disowned by all.' England, where he was born, could not forgive his love of

liberty ; America, whose liberties he helped to achieve, could not forgive his love of truth ; and France, whose liberties he labored in vain to fix on sure foundations, could not forgive his love of mercy."

This man has been the sport of as cruel a fate as ever pursued the path of mortal. His native land had for him only a prison ; his much-loved France carried him with shouts of triumph and pride through the streets one day, and the next threatened him with death, while our country refused him the grave he desired. Paine had but to hear the cry of liberty to rush to her rescue. His manhood could not stoop to king or priest. His loyalty to truth made him an enemy to the church, and his love of man made him hate the priest. If ever a man wore through life the breast-plate of truth, this was the man. If ever a man was buried in the shroud of ingratitude, then was Thomas Paine.

It was Paine's work on "Common Sense" that made the American Colonies the United States. On this work Jefferson pointed the pen that declared our independence, and Washington whetted the sword that achieved it. All honor then to the memory of him who was our nation's friend when she needed one, and dishonor be to those who refuse to do justice to his memory.

It is not my purpose to give the life of Thomas Paine, only to give enough of it to show the man and to point out in some measure his great services to our country.

We do not care to show Paine a saint. We do not labor to paint an object of worship for the world's sentiment to kneel to ; our task will be to show how brave and true a man he was, and with what heroism and sacrifice he labored for liberty. I do not like perfect men (they do not live here on earth), much less do I like a great man perfect. There were faults in the subject of this sketch which we have no wish to hide or cover up, but there were virtues which ornament human life, which have been denied him by the world too long.

Thomas Paine was born in Thetford, England, on the 29th day of January, 1737.

We will pass over the first years of his life, as they were not marked by any events which possess historical interest. In the Fall of 1774 Paine sailed for America with letters of recommendation from Franklin, who was then in London. Almost immediately upon his arrival in Philadelphia he was made editor of the Pennsylvania Magazine, and it is in this periodical that some of Paine's most beautiful writings are found. Of Paine's literary abilities much has been said, his enemies asserting that he was a coarse writer, with some boldness of thought and originality of expression, but without literary culture or taste, while his friends have ranked him with Goldsmith, Congreve and Addison for elegance of diction, and point of utterance. His style is clear, forcible, and independent. He had no master in literature more than in politics or religion. He spoke what he thought, and his language as well as his thought was his own. One is constantly reminded in reading the works of Paine that he cared only to be sincere to his idea. He wanted no false robes of rhetoric to adorn the form of truth. He used plain speech, and dealt in simple, but chaste language.

The charm of a literary life to such a man as Paine was a temptation hard to resist, but his great love of humanity, which was intensified to a passion as he beheld it suffering from tyranny and superstition, turned his mind from contemplation of nature and more congenial habits to the violent but useful course of political pursuits. Paine's character, as the world best knows it, is that of a revolutionist. He was a man of convictions; such a man as turns the world from its course; such a man as stands ready in some crisis to direct and command. Paine was not one of those negative characters that are borne about by the force of events, and floated into notice on the noisy surface of popular excitement, but he was a positive man; one who had the power to shape and control events. This was the part

he played in the great revolutionary drama that was acted on this Continent a century ago, and if his brave, manly figure be not as prominent on the stage of military action, it is because he was filling a higher place and performing a greater service. We have not space to give the history of the events which brought the American people to the morning of the 17th of June, 1775. We can merely assert what is matter of common knowledge — that previous to this time the idea of National Independence had gained no considerable hold upon the minds of the people.

In October, 1774, the American Congress then assembled to see what answer should be made to the question, "Shall we make common cause with Boston?" in their resolutions, "declare themselves His Majesty's loyal subjects. They declare that they are Englishmen and want only Englishmen's rights, and ask to be restored to the situation of 1763." No thought of Independence entered into the deliberations of this Congress; and the next spring, when the battles of Lexington and Concord were fought, and the Americans organized for resistance, with Washington as chief commander, it was for the avowed purpose of regaining their rights as loyal subjects, and not as free citizens of an independent nation. The American Congress in July, 1775, published a declaration desiring reconciliation with Britain, and also sent a petition to the King. After waiting six months for a favorable reply to the petition and receiving no answer, but instead, being informed that a large body of foreign troops was to be brought against the colonists, hope began to die out, and fear and anger excited the hearts of the people. It was at this period that Thomas Paine published his work on "Common Sense," in which he "boldly proposed independence as the best way out of the difficulties into which they had plunged, and as an object alone worth fighting for."

This work seemed a stroke of fate. It went like a conviction to the people's heart. Opinion was changed. He

showed that there could be a better government than the British, and he opened the eyes of the Americans to a future which we have since realized. "Common Sense" was read wherever people could read; in some places with fear and trembling; in others with fear and hope. A few exclaimed at once, "Independence for America!", while the large majority were soon prepared for the arguments of "Common Sense." The scene at Albany, as described by Rickman, indicates the feeling that prevailed when this bold pamphlet was first issued. A perspiration of fear seemed to start out all over the land, but it was soon succeeded by a thrill of patriotism that fired the veins of America until the "Common Sense" of Paine was vindicated, and the cry of liberty burst from every foot of soil in the United States.

Rickman says, "When 'Common Sense' arrived at Albany, the Convention of New York was in session. General Scott, a leading member, alarmed at the boldness and novelty of its arguments, mentioned his fears to several of his distinguished colleagues, and suggested a private meeting in the evening, for the purpose of writing an answer. They accordingly met, and Mr. McKesson read the pamphlet through. At first it was deemed both necessary and expedient to answer it immediately; but casting about for the necessary arguments, they concluded to adjourn and meet again. In a few evenings they assembled, but so rapid was the change of opinion in the Colonies at large that they ultimately agreed not to oppose it." The popularity of this work may be imagined when we read that not less than ~~X~~ one hundred thousand copies of it were sold. When Paine saw the great demand for his work he gave the copyright to every State, declaring that what he wrote was not for his own selfish interest, but for the good of the world. When we remember that Paine was a poor man, and that he could have realized quite a fortune from the sale of his work, his generous deed in giving to America his thoughts and re-

fusing the ordinary profits from their publication, shows the measure of his patriotism and the depths of the man. On the 4th of July, 1776, Congress declared the Colonies free and independent States, which was within a few months after the publication of "Common Sense." Paine immediately volunteered his services to the United States, and enlisted as a private in the army. He accompanied the army of Independence as an itinerant writer, and the first number of the "Crisis" was published in December, 1776, after Washington's defeat on Long Island, and after the loss of Forts Washington and Lee. The army of Independence, so hopeful six months before, had met only loss and defeat, and it was fast dwindling away, and the cause of liberty with it, when, through the air like a bugleblast, sounded these opening words of the first "Crisis": "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country, but he who stands it now deserves the thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered ; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict the more glorious the triumph." The historian of the Revolution tells us that this pamphlet was read to every corporal's guard, and that the effect was little less than magical. Hope and courage were infused into the ranks; deserters returned, and once more the army was ready to face the foe. The pen was mightier than the sword in those days of the Revolution, and Thomas Paine, with his brave words, was the power that kept the fire of freedom burning in the hearts of the people. The battle of Trenton was won within a month after the first "Crisis" was issued, and enthusiasm filled the country. Paine wrote the second number in January, 1777, congratulating the States upon the victory of Trenton, and ridiculing the proclamation of Lord Howe. On the 19th of April following, the third number came out. A few days previous Paine had been elected by Congress Secre-

tary to the Committee for Foreign Affairs, which office he held for two years.

In 1780, when the country was financially embarrassed, Paine proposed to Congress the way of relief, and the following year he accompanied Col. Laurens to Paris, where they obtained six million livres as a present, and ten millions as a loan. Nothing was too hazardous for Paine to undertake; nothing too bold for him to dare. There was no sacrifice he would not make for freedom, and the first man to step into the breach of duty, the place of sacrifice during those "times that tried men's souls," was Thomas Paine. When our country was almost bankrupt, before Paine went to France; when Washington feared the dissolution of the army for want of pay, Paine started a private subscription with five hundred dollars (all the money he had, including his salary as Secretary), and raised over three hundred thousand dollars. Throughout the entire seven years' struggle his courage never faltered, his generous spirit never flagged; and the "Crisis" continued to be published until peace was declared, and the prize of national freedom won forever. At the close of the war Paine retired to Bordentown, where the grateful friendship of Washington found him. The following letter to Paine shows in what esteem Washington held him:—

"ROCKY HILL, Sept. 10th, 1783.

"I have learned since I have been at this place that you are at Bordentown; whether for the sake of retirement or economy I know not. Be it for either, for both, or whatever it may, if you will come to this place and partake with me I shall be exceedingly happy to see you at it. Your presence may remind Congress of your past services to this country, and if it is in my power to impress them, command my best exertions with freedom, as they will be rendered cheerfully by one who entertains a lively sense of the importance of your works, and who, with much pleasure, subscribes himself,

Your sincere friend,

G. WASHINGTON."

The country did not forget Paine's services. Two years after peace was declared Congress ordered the sum of three

thousand dollars to be paid to Mr. Thomas Paine for his "early, unsolicited and continued labors" in behalf of the United States of America. The Legislature of Pennsylvania gave him twenty-five hundred dollars, and the Assembly of New York voted him a large estate at New Rochelle.

Is it possible that in one century America has forgotten the services of Thomas Paine? Can ingratitude go so far as to allow this man's name to be the sport and scorn of a superstition? America's debt to Thomas Paine is a debt of justice. Shall it be paid now, or is it too much to ask America to be just while it is Christian? Some day our nation is to bend in humiliation over the dust of Thomas Paine, and ask forgiveness of that silent ground that holds his ashes, for its cowardly silence when his name has been aspersed. There is the dust of a hero in our soil, and in future years thousands will make a pilgrimage to the spot where the marble shaft shall proclaim, "Here was laid the body of Thomas Paine, the friend of right, truth and man."

In 1787, his work in America being finished, Paine went to England to erect an iron bridge — which he had invented during his leisure time in America — over the river Wear, partly at his own expense.

Shortly after the completion of this enterprise, Paine published in England the first part of his great political work, entitled, "Rights of Man," and in 1791 the second part, for which quite an army of booksellers, together with Paine, were fined and imprisoned. It was the next year, when France was hastening forward to that insane period of her national life, that Paine sailed for Calais. He took sides with the oppressed in all lands, and he labored to do for religious liberty in France what he did for political liberty in America, and tried to do in England. When the order of priesthood was abolished throughout France, Paine saw that the people were in danger of forsaking all religion, and he wrote his "Age of Reason," to show that the religion of the priest was false, and to point out the way

to a higher life than that of the church, and a better religion than that of the priest. The world has not yet been able to appreciate his effort.

Paine was elected a representative in the national convention of France, and took his seat in the fall of 1792. It was while in this convention that his love of mercy gained for him the hatred of the ruling spirits of France, and nearly cost him his life. Louis XVI. had been condemned to death by the Assembly, and Thomas Paine rose, and with a courage inspired by his great love of right and justice, protested in the name of liberty against the deed. History has never been called upon to preserve nobler, grander, manlier speech than the words of Paine on that occasion. Facing enmity, persecution, and perhaps death, yet caring more for the right than for himself, he cried out, "Destroy the King but save the man! strike the crown but spare the heart!"

"These are not the words of Thomas Paine," exclaimed a dozen voices from different parts of the hall. "They are my words," said the brave man, and for speaking them he was thrown into a dungeon, where he lay for eleven months, during which time he was twice sentenced to the guillotine, but escaped almost by a miracle.

The first part of the "Age of Reason," written while Paine was imprisoned, was published in Paris in 1795. Paine remained in France until 1802, when he embarked for America. Seven years of old age were spared him in this land, and in 1809 he died in Greenwich Village. His remains were carried to his farm in New Rochelle, and there buried.

Had Paine, like Jefferson, Adams, Franklin and others of that period, suppressed his religious opinions, his name would to-day be spoken with honor by those who now speak it with contempt. Thomas Paine is hated to-day, not because he was a bad man, but because he wrote the "Age of Reason." Paine's crime was not against humanity, but

against the church. He dared tell the truth in religion as in politics. The true way for the Christian church to meet Thomas Paine is to refute his arguments, not abuse his name. It is easy to call a man an infidel, but it would be more just to show that he is one. There was that in the character of Thomas Paine which will endure when the church which has maligned him will have no knee to bend before its altar, and no lips to rehearse its prayers. This man spoke what was true against the church's religion, and that is why the church cannot answer him. Paine's religious convictions must be those of every man who thinks for himself. The Christian cries out, "Tom Paine had no religion." Not quite so fast, my Christian friend; has a man no religion because he has not yours? We read in this much-abused "Age of Reason" (and what we read there is the language of a man whose identity cannot be mistaken), "I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.

"I believe in the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy. The word of God is the creation we behold. The world is my country; to do good my religion."

This is the creed of the *infidel* THOMAS PAINE, and if every Christian church in America were founded upon the religious principles contained therein, there would be less unhappiness in the world, and a brighter look in the faces of men and women. The Christian church has branded Paine as an Atheist. He says, "I believe in one God and no more."

The Christian church has called Paine a man without religion. His religion, he said, was "doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make his fellow-creatures happy."

My Christian friends, let us tell the truth about this man. He did not believe in the Deity of Jesus, but he *did* believe in God. He did not accept the Bible as God's word, but he

did accept God's creation. He did not practice the hypocrisy of the Christian church, and profess to believe what no man of common sense *can* believe, but he practiced what he believed to be right, and believed what to him was true. Paine's religion had help in it, had brotherly love, kindness and mercy in it, but it had no damnation for those who did not accept it. That Paine had no patience with the professing religionist is well known, and, that he often indulged in bitter language against the Christian church, is evidenced in his works. He always had a right word for the many opponents who sought his conversion, and knew just how to treat the pious sycophants and religious bores, that pestered honest people then as they do now.

Passing through Baltimore he was accosted by the Rev. Mr. Hargrove, minister of a new sect. "You are Mr. Paine," said Mr. Hargrove. "Yes sir." "My name is Hargrove, I am minister of the New Jerusalem Church here. We, sir, explain the scripture in its true meaning. The key has been lost above four thousand years, and we have found it!" "Then," said Paine drily, "It must have got very rusty."

It has been iterated and reiterated, especially by the pulpit, that Paine changed his religious opinions before he died. This is only another of those falsehoods told by parties who imagined they were doing a service to the cause of truth by uttering it. We have the testimony of Mr. Amasa Wordsworth, who was present with him every day for six weeks before he died, and stood by his bedside when the angel of death put his cold arms around his form, and he declares that the last words Paine ever spoke were these: "I have no wish to believe on that subject," in answer to a question put by Dr. Manly, "If he wished to believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God." Paine died as he lived, true to his religious convictions.

There was no blot on the public life of Thomas Paine. It was pure and white, without spot or blemish. His private character was not without some flaws. He was at times

provoked to words and deeds that in calmer moments he never could have been guilty of. That he was not perfect in temper is the testimony of his nurse. Paine was never profane, immoral or untruthful. He could not tolerate profanity, and falsehood had no friend in Thomas Paine.

There is one charge against Paine that his friends have feared was too true; namely, that he drank intoxicating liquors during the latter part of his life to excess. That Paine used liquors in moderate quantities, is attested by those who lived with and knew him, but those persons declare that they never saw Paine intoxicated, and that he never drank to excess. Mr. Lovett with whom he boarded in New York said, that he drank less than any boarder in his house, and Mr. Jarvis, his almost constant attendant for years, said that Paine "did not and could not drink much." Drinking was not a vice that marked an individual, but one that marked the times. Almost everyone used more or less spirituous liquors, and Paine was no exception to the men of his age.

This slander, that Paine was a drunkard, has been ably refuted by Mr. Vale, his biographer, who visited in 1840 the home of Paine, where all of the old inhabitants testified that they never saw Thomas Paine worse for liquor.

Drinking in the last century was not looked upon with that degree of abhorrence, with which this age regards it, and the friends of Paine may, without fear, allow his life to be judged just as it was. We know he had failings, enough to make him human, but he was a rare man, endowed with great natural powers, and a sincere man, one who was tried in times when the weak went to the wall, and only the strong could endure. Let us admit all his faults; he had fewer than most great men. As a man who loved truth, he ranks with the truest; as a man who loved liberty, he has scarcely a peer; and as a man who loved his fellow-man, he stands with the great lovers of his race.

I venture to say, that the men and women who pronounce

the name of Paine with detestation, would be ashamed to acknowledge their ignorance of his life and history. I also venture the assertion, that if those same men and women would read the life of Paine, their prejudice would vanish their hate turn to admiration, and their denunciation to honor

Such honest and honorable public service as Paine rendered America would adorn our nation with a personal splendor that in this age has been sadly wanting. Such a religion as Paine had would make our churches temples to God and truth which now are on a level with the idol-houses of India and China.

America must pay a tribute of respect to this man, or forever stand condemned for injustice and ingratitude toward one of her bravest and noblest champions.

It needs no prophet-glance to see that the name of Thomas Paine is to grow brighter and brighter as the years wear away, and that as superstition loses its hold upon the mind, and the age of reason dawns in the soul, this man is to be judged by his fidelity to his opinions, and not by his antagonism to the popular religion.

When in the distant future the names of those who have best served the human race shall be written on the world's scroll of honor, that of THOMAS PAINE will be written near the head of the list.



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